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SUBJECT: Uribe denounces Soacha defendants' release, soldiers restricted to base

REF: BOGOTA25

¶11. Seven additional Soacha "false positive" -- military murders presented as combat kills -- defendants were ordered released on January 12 because they had been held in pre-trial detention longer than the legal limit. Defense Minister Gabriel Silva Lujan announced on January 10 that the 17 Soacha defendants released January 7 on the same procedural grounds (reftel) were restricted to the 13th Artillery Battalion's base in Bogota. The defendants will work internally on the base until the completion of their trial. The Ministry of Defense's Human Rights Office could not immediately confirm that the same restriction will be applied to all released military defendants in the Soacha case, but post will continue to monitor the situation. The MOD reiterated the Ministry's commitment to support the civilian justice system in its investigations of human rights violations.

¶12. On January 11, President Uribe denounced the recent releases of suspects of serious crimes based on time limits in pre-trial detention. He deplored the release of the 17 Soacha military defendants as well as the December 30 release of six alleged Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) members. Uribe further expressed concern that the international community would view the releases as evidence that the GOC tolerates impunity.

¶13. Bogota Human Rights Ombudsman Volmar Perez called for the pre-trial detention limit to be doubled in cases of alleged human rights violations. Inspector General Alejandro Ordóñez (Procurador), charged with disciplinary investigations of government employees, announced an investigation into decisions for evidence of negligence. Ordóñez sharply criticized the Superior Judicial Council for taking four months to rule on a defense motion. Acting Prosecutor General Guillermo Mendoza condemned the defense's delay tactics and reiterated his office's determination to appeal. Lawyers for the family members of the victims announced they would request the International Criminal Court to review the case.

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